

PRESS RELEASE



ARIZONA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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House increases penalties for sex trafficking of children

STATE CAPITOL, PHOENIX – The Arizona House of Representative passed legislation that expands the definition of racketeering to include human trafficking and increases penalties for drawing a child into prostitution. In addition, House Bill 2454 clarifies definitions of child prostitution and establishes an affirmative defense for victims who in the past have been prosecuted as criminals.

“Those who lure our children into prostitution must face the highest levels of punishment the law can provide,” Speaker Tobin said. “Victims of these crimes must not be lumped in with the perpetrators who profit from them.”

Cindy McCain, wife of U.S. Senator John McCain, is co-chair of the Task Force on Human Trafficking created by Governor Brewer to look into the issue in Arizona; Mrs. McCain has been working to pass legislation on human trafficking and child prostitution across the country.

“[T]hese rings don’t operate solely within state or even national borders, which is why comprehensive federal legislation is necessary,” Mrs. McCain wrote in an Washington Post op ed. “. The Stop Exploitation through Trafficking Act would create a national strategy to combat human trafficking to encourage cooperation among all the different agencies — federal, state and local — that work on this problem.”

Rep. Doug Coleman, Republican from Apache Junction, is a task force member and has been vocal in his support of Mrs. McCain’s efforts. Rep. Coleman said in an interview with Cronkite News, “I just don’t understand why we have a law that seemingly protects the demand side, the johns, because that’s really, in my opinion, what it’s designed to do.”

In addition the legislation:

- Makes obtaining a child from a shelter designed to serve runaway youth, foster children, homeless persons or victims of domestic violence an aggravating circumstance to be considered by the jury
- Prescribes an affirmative defense to child prostitution if the defendant is a victim of sex trafficking
- Prescribes advertising requirements and civil penalties for escort agency and message therapy businesses

PRESS RELEASE

- Authorizes monies in the state and the county anti-racketeering revolving funds to be spent on programs that provide assistance to victims